1994

Oral History Interview: William Hunt

William Hunt

Owens Glass History Project

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: 6/28/94

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REV. 1/91

OWENS GLASS HISTORY PROJECT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: WILLIAM E. HUNT

CONDUCTED BY: CHRISTIE KASPRZAK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 28, 1994

Christie: Today's date is June 28th, and the interview is for the Owens Glass History Project. What is your full name?

Bill: William Edward Hunt. Everybody calls me Bill. (okay) Don't call me William. (okay, I won't)

Christie: When were you born?

Bill: 19, February the 13th, 1930.

Christie: Where did you go to school?

Bill: Chesapeake High school. Graduated in 1949.

Christie: And you're married? (yes) What's your wife's name? (Mary) When did you get married?

Bill: You asked me a question...men don't remember
We've been married 20, 20 years. (20 years)

Christie: And you have children? (yes) How many children?

Bill: Between the two of us we've got seven. (7 children?) Her husband died. (oh, okay) She has four and I had three. We put 'em together and raised them.

Christie: A house full, though.

Bill: Yeah.

Christie: Uh...when did you begin working at Owens?

Bill: August 5th, 1956.

Christie: And what job did you start at?

Bill: I started in the shipping department at 26th Street, the Tobacco Warehouse. We had ware stored up there and we rented the warehouse when the tobacco sales were not going on. And then when it was time to sell tobacco, we had to leave the warehouse and come back down at the factory and work.

Christie: And then how did your career change over the years?

Bill: My career changed from shipping department when we had a furnace rebuild, they needed an apprentice boy in the mold shop. And uh, they sent me to mold storage to work on a rebuild. And while I was in mold storage, I found out about them needing an apprentice boy. So I asked the uh, boss of the mold shop about the apprenticeship. And they wanted an apprentice boy who hadn't crossed the picket line because the flint glass workers union had been on a 9-day strike. And they wouldn't hire anybody that crossed the picket line. So I didn't cross the picket line, so they hired me as an apprentice boy, after the furnace rebuild. And I served four years apprenticeship, and actually, I'm called a mold maker, but my trade is a machinist. (oh, okay) We're machinist,

but they called us mold makers. Because we worked on the molds that manufacture the bottles. (but you repaired them?) We repaired them. (not really....) We didn't manufacture them (right). We...when the mold moved out to the machine line, it would get torn up, corners would get knocked down on it. And you can't make a bottle with a corner knocked out, 'cause you'll have chipped glass. And so, we'd bring it back in the shop, the GBA would, had truckers and that'd go out and get 'em, bring 'em in, sandblast 'em, take 'em to the mold makers, and the mold makers would repair 'em. And they'd take 'em back and polish 'em, then take them back to the machine line. Then, when we first went to Owens, in '56, we had 32 machines in operation, and the machines were like 5 sections or 8 sections. And they uh, only would send like 7 molds or 7 blanks, two pieces of mold equipment for a job change. And we would get the job changes out in the shop. And the schedule would run like 45-50 job changes a week, which was a lot of job changes. And we usually had to work 50 hours a week to get the work out. We'd work two 12's and a 10. And uh, that would make our 50 hours.

Christie: How many of you worked that?

Bill: In the first beginning of the mold makers, I believe there was 28 of us. If I'm not mistaken. There was like 75 people in my department when we first went there. GBBA's, and American Flint Glass Workers Union, two unions in the shop.

Christie: So uh, did you work shift work?

Bill: No, I never worked shift work. The uh, we had four shift men in the shop. But I never did have to work shift work in the shop, because people in the shop was younger than I was [clears throat] pardon me. When I first went there, there was older people working and, but they wanted to work it, 'cause they got a quarter more on the hour (if you worked shifts?). If you worked midnights, 15 cents per evening shift, and I think they got a nickel for day shift. Anyway, they got a shift differential. And it made a little bit extra money. Then they covered a shift and it was overtime plus shift mold makers worked the overtime on their shifts. We really didn't work the overtime, hardly at all. Unless they was going on vacation, and somebody had to fill in.

Christie: Alright. Now you worked mold, as a mold maker for how many years?

Bill: Well, I was only at the factory I think four months when I got on an apprenticeship. So uh, I worked it almost, well, 35 years and 5 months, or something like that. As a mold maker.

Christie: And you said your last two years you were doing supervising?

Bill: Working foreman.

Christie: Working foreman.

Bill: Mmm-hmm. What happened... mold shop supervisor, they transferred him to the machine line to train him on the machine line. And uh, so, when they did that, I run the shop while he was out there; I took care of it. (okay) They asked me to do it...well, what they did, they went down the seniority list and there was only one man older than me in the shop, so they asked him and he didn't want it, and I took it, because it made me a lot more money. (it did?) Mmmm-hmm.

Christie: Did you get any other kind of benefits?

Bill: No. (no?) No, see, I was a working foreman but I was still in the union. I was governed by the union, but still yet, I had the authority to run the shop and I was in charge of the men that we had in the shop. (I see) So they had to do what I told them to do.

Christie: Okay. So you were running the shop, but you were still an hourly worker? (right) I see.

Bill: That's why they call us a working foreman. (right) Okay.

Christie: So what did that change mean to you? Anything....having a uh, being sort of supervising, did it change your relationships with the men you worked with?

Bill: No, no, it did not change my relationship because I tell you why. We had worked, we had worked together all these years and we were friends. And like I told 'em, I said, "Men, your job puts the bread and butter on your table, it's up to you to do your job." But that's all there was to it. So they did their job. (that's wonderful) See, everybody knew what to do. You didn't have to go tell them what to do. (right) The only thing was I had a GBBA trucker, and what we call a trucker, he had an electric truck and he'd pick up a truck-load of molds and I had him to dispatch it in to certain men to work on, and after they'd work on it and get it repaired, they'd send it across the bins and the inspector looked at their work, and inspected. Then he sent it on the truck-load. Then the dispatcher would get it and take it to the polishers and the polishers would polish it, and park it in the shop for time for it to go out on the machine line and go on the job.

Christie: You just oversaw it (yeah), and made sure everything was

Bill: Well, what I had to do when I was a working foreman, you had to order all the things you needed for the shop, all the material you had to order. You'd had to take care of all the men's time cards. You had to make sure everybody was on the job. And you had to take care of all the working schedules and get the schedule out, because you had a schedule to meet, to make production (right). And then I had to go to four or five meetings a day besides that. The company has a lot of meetings. (oh, really? what kind of meetings?) Well, it was supervisors' meetings, where you go in and talk over your schedule, what you're gonna do, and what jobs going on what machine, and when it run last time, what was wrong with it.

Why you only got 75 or 85% production out of it. What you could do to change it to get more production, things of this nature.

Christie: I see. So you had a lot of meetings. (mmm-hmm) So what parts of your job did you like, and what parts did you not?

Bill: Well, let me tell you, when I first went there as an apprentice boy, okay. When you first go as an apprentice boy, you're green. You don't know anything about nothing. Period. [laughter] And the older men in the shop have to teach you. Especially machinists work. There is math in it, there's degrees and tapers and radiuss and all those kind of things, on machines. And uh, what I did to begin with on apprenticeship, I helped a guy set up neck rings. There was a guide collar that went in the neck ring, because the neck ring is in half. There was a round collar goes in it with a cavity seat in it and it goes together like that and opens up and the parison falls out. Then it inverts and goes over in the mold that is made in the blank. So we had to put the guide collars in and uh, they could only like 2000 clearance. If they had any more than that in it, why, the hot glass would get under, between the collar and the ring and cause a big flange on top the bottle. So we had to set collars and rings up. And then I made cast iron bushings. (what is that?) Cast iron bushings. And what the bushings were, we'd take a round piece of stalk maybe it was 2 inches in diameter, and uh, it had a, we might have a 3/4 inch hole in it, maybe not, maybe half inch or whatever size plunger we was gonna put up through the collar, and uh, they were half inch thick and whatever diameter we needed, like 2 and 1/8 in diameter. And we would take a guide collar and bore it out, and press that bushing in it, 2000's tight. And then we would take and bore the diameter [inaudible]...out in it, and then we'd take our radius tool and put the cavity in it that made the finish part on the bottom, right on the main top of the bottom. And I did that. Then the uh, the man that I was gonna take his place, he was...they let him stay an extra year, but he was 66 years old when he retired, because they couldn't get anybody to put on apprenticeship. In fact, back then, they was having trouble gettin' people for the job, because it, they weren't available. Not like it is now. And uh, he run a finish lathe. And when he retired, they put me on the finish lathe, and I was only in my apprenticeship two years. But from that time on, I did all the finish work in the shop. (wow, a lot of responsibility) Yeah. Not only did I do all the, the finish work, but our tools were carbon tools. And uh, they had to be ground on a diamond wheel. And we had a comparitor there and we would make a comparitor sketch of the tool that we had to make, and I would take it to the grinding wheel on that diamond wheel, and grind the form tools. And when I left there, I had about a hundred and fifty different form tools for different jobs of finish that I have ground over a period of time. (wow) To make the finish.

Christie: You were actually making your tools that you used to repair....

Bill: We made, I made the tools.

Christie: And those tools are used to repair the molds?

Bill: Yeah. I've got some out there in my toolbox, I'll show you. (Yeah, I'd love to see them) And uh, but uh, then we had a, we had a triple head duplicating machine in the shop. [clears throat] What that triple head machine did, we'd make a pattern and then we had three pieces that wasn't like the pattern. And we'd put it in a machine with a mill tool, and this stylist would trace this pattern. As it'd trace this pattern, there was three other heads cutting the same pattern that the stylist was tracing, and I did that. (Oh, I see) We had a man in the shop who did it and he transferred to North Carolina. And when he did, I took the job. As part of my job. See, you had to take more than one job. And uh, I was the only man after he left in the shop that they ever let run that machine. They would never train nobody on it.

Christie: Now, was this the department considered more highly skilled than others?

Bill: It was a highly skilled department, right. Any time you've got people that runs the lays or milling machines or duplicators or planers or millers, they're highly skilled people.

Christie: Now, is that why you had a separate union?

Bill: Yes. Now the other union was the GBBA was like uh, they were semi-skilled. They were just polishers and truckers and they did the janitorial work in the shop, and went and got supplies, and things like that.

Christie: Un-huh. So were you involved in, were you active in the union? (oh, yeah) What kind of...

Bill: Well, I wasn't the president or nothing like that, but I was one of the union members. (and you went to meetings?) Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, I went to the meetings and voted and all that for the union. If it hadn't been for the union, we wouldn't have nothing. I'm telling you. Because these companies, they...we wouldn't have had no insurance, we'd never got no raises, we'd not got anything. We'd be working for minimum wage. Thanks to the union we don't. (yeah) We got retirement and everything. Because they went to the bargaining table and bargained that we could have something other than nothing. (right, right) So that's the way it was.

Christie: Did you ever go on strike with the union?

Bill: We went on strike once. We went on strike in '59, I think we was out 53 days. And we was on strike twice besides that, but I don't remember the years. We was out a couple of times, 50 some days.

Christie: Wow. A couple times. (mmm-hmm) Now, when one union would strike, would the others also go strike?

Bill: They used to do that. Whenever they, whenever, for years

ago, after it got up in the '80's and '90's, why, a lot of 'em crossed the picket lines.

Christie: Really? (yeah) Why did that change?

Bill: Well, I don't know, if younger generations come in, I guess, they were afraid of their jobs and afraid they'd get fired, and uh, of course, in the contract, the other contract, they wasn't supposed to block out or go out. But legally they could. But the majority of the people stayed out, and honored your picket line. (right) Until the last strike we had, and I don't know, I think it might have been in '83, I'm not sure. But anyway, the uh, whole machine line went back in. But we got our strike settled in 2 or 3 days after that.

Christie: And who crossed the strike that time?

Bill: Well, what happened, you know, what happens on that is our contract we was under run out. Okay. And they started negotiating maybe two or three months before the contract expired. And it was like over insurance and retirement benefits and things of this nature.

Christie: And that's just for your group?

Bill: That was just for our group. (I see) Now uh...after we uh, what we had in the shop, we had a cast rack and in that cast rack we had sulphur pots that melted sulphur. And we'd take that sulphur and we would poor it into a cavity of a mold or a blank. Then we'd weigh it on a set of water scales to see how much capacity that bottle was holding. If it didn't hold the right capacity, then we'd have to alter that bottle...that mold or blank to get the right capacity of weight in it, to hold the right amount of fluid that went in the bottle. And I know when the 500 milliliters came out, whiskey bottles, and uh, 250, 750, the 500 milliliters, I worked day in and day out altering the bottles, the mold, because they never got the right capacity. And from when they designed them in Toledo. And uh, we'd have to take, they'd have light heels or light shoulders or the heels'd be light and they'd break. And they had to withstand so much pressure. And they'd take the bottles to Q & S and then put 'em under pressure after they were needed went they went through the lahrs to see if they would hold the pressure. And if they had a thin place in the bottle, they'd break. And we'd have to take the mold to the shop, or blanks, which ever the bottom plate...we worked on the baffles and we'd take...iron out certain places, we knew where to take the iron out. And then that would let more glass go in that area to make the walls thicker, and they wouldn't break.

Christie: Without the union, did you ever have uh, did the union ever help get better working conditions? (oh, yeah) What kind of working conditions?

Bill: Well, like working conditions you're talking about breaks. Uh...safer conditions in the shop, and uh, they would, they would get us, we'd get better insurance, we'd have better retirement,

we'd, we got paid for so many holidays that we wouldn't have got paid for. If you worked a holiday, like the 4th, I've worked a many July 4th because we just, they wouldn't shut down, and you'd get paid 3 days for 1. (wow) So uh, that compensated you for having to work through holidays.

Christie: Right. What about the safety, though?

Bill: No. (it wasn't?) No. We had safety directors in the plant, and they went around and checked in all your areas. And if we had something in the shop that wasn't safe, we would report it and then they would have to come in and fix it.

Christie: Did you know of any serious accidents?

Bill: Oh, I'd say there's ...two or three guys over there got killed. (did they really?) Three got burned up in a tractor and trailer at one time. (how did that happen?) They were, they had a, I think it was a canvas covered over top the box on their trailer and they were up in it cleaning something out and they had a fire on, where they was cleaning it out, and the wind blew and caught that canvas on fire and burned up.

Christie: The fire on the hot end?

Bill: No, it was outside in the field. (outside, yeah) Down in shipping some place. And then we had uh, one man got killed in the batch hall. I don't think they ever knew how he got killed. And we had one guy that was eating his lunch, and they had a bunch of guys in a room in machine and repair and they ate their lunch and it was time to go back to work at 12:30, and uh, they was getting ready to leave the room and uh, they went over to wake him up to go eat-they thought he was sittin' there asleep-and he was sittin' there dead. And uh...we've had uh, we've had several accidents. People have been hurt pretty bad sometimes. But uh, I think we, one guy caught on fire on the hot end; he died. I think when he got caught on fire, he had a heart attack. And there was one guy that was working in batch and furnace and they had him down in a pit cleaning it out with a short-handled broom, and he got his arm caught under a conveyor belt, and they couldn't get him out and the nurse came out there to cut his arm off. (ohhh) But before she cut his arm off they got him out. (oh, did they?) Un-huh. (how awful) And he quit the plant and left. He's in the insurance business. He's made a fabulous business in the insurance business.

Christie: Things that are dangerous like that, did the union ever try to change conditions or is that just the nature of the business?

Bill: Well, those things there were just bad accidents that happened. It's things that happened. You know, one guy was on a tow motor working in maintenance, and he was coming up a catwalk and a big tow motor, I don't know what happened, but anyway, he went through the safety rail, flipped upside down on the, on the uh, floor where they make the bottles. And I thought the guy was

dead. And uh, anyways, he didn't die-he lived. But basically he had to retire. There's several people gets hurt in industry now, I'm tell you. (yeah) There's a lot of people don't realize you go in those factories, you see what all goes on, then you realize. People gets their hands hurt in machines, gets their fingers cut off and things.

Christie: Plus breathing in all that glass and dust.

Bill: That's whats wrong with me now. (is that what it is?) I think it is. I'm not sure, but I uh, I just had a chest x-ray and uh, and these lawyers has sent me this letter back and said, "Reviewing physical has interprets your chest x-ray film as being consistent with the presence of asbestos related disease." So uh, here's the letter.

Christie: Yeah. I know. I heard the plant expects some suits.

Bill: So I'm having a little bit of trouble right now, breathing.

Christie: You should be able to get compensation.

Bill: Well, they're gonna try to get it....

Christie: I bet there's a number....

Bill: There's been several already got money. But see, in the shop the uh, pipes that we got heat from, were wrapped in asbestos. And one of the big heaters in front of the shop was a steam heater and the pipes that went to it was wrapped. And I worked under those things. But anyway...

Christie: [inaudible]

Bill: Well, honey, back then we didn't know nothing about asbestos. (yeah) See, this asbestos only came out in the last few years. (yeah) It wasn't, back when I was working, they didn't...say nothing about it. But uh, see, I breathed an awful lot of iron dust. Because I'd come home and take me a shower and like sit around the house, if I got a little bit hot, perspired a little bit, you could smell cast iron. It would sweat out in the pores of my skin. And my shirt pockets, where it'd get in my shirt pockets, it'd be real rusty. It'd rust when my wife would wash 'em. So uh, you breathed a lot of industrial dust; industrial dust is bad. (yeah) But now on the bench where the men worked in the vices, they had dust collectors on theirs, 'cause they did a lot of grinding and welding, stuff of that nature. And they had dust collectors and they caught the biggest part of the dust. Now on the lays, they didn't have the dust collectors. (is that right?) Mmm-hmm. And another thing I did at Owens, I used to do about all the alteration work, (all the what?) alteration, alteration. In cavities where they wasn't the right capacity. (oh) Like gallons or molds or blanks, whatever. And I had a hydraulic profile lay, and I made a profile with a pattern that I wanted to bore the cavity out. And I put it on the machine and I had a stylist that would trace that profile I had on there. And it

had a big boring bar, and I'd stick it back in the cavity and it would bore that cavity to what I'd made that profile to cut the cavity. So I did all that for years.

Christie: It does sound like a very highly skilled job.

Bill: It was. (yeah) And another thing. Toledo would call down here and they'd want a special thread made on a, for a ring for a bottle or something, and I'd tell them to send a blueprint. I'd grind a tool to make the ring. And they'd call down here and the supervisor said whatever you need, just send it down, Bill will fix it. [laughs] I'm not braggin' on myself. Don't misunderstand me.

Christie: Sounds like they had a lot of confidence in you, though.

Bill: But uh, we uh, this uh, McCormick bottle that Kerr used to make, McCormick's, when they made the caps, the tamper-proof caps, well, Kerr was making the bottles and the closures, and we call the caps the closures. And uh, so uh, they wasn't having any luck with it, so they uh, called in to the shop and wanted a special lug put in the ring that would break the uh, plastic closure when they opened it, then that way they would know that uh, it had been tampered with (I see). So uh, they sent it to me, I ground a tool and made it, and they made 144 dozen of them and sent 'em to McCormick. And all McCormick's big wheels went to their flow lines, seen 'em fill, put the caps on 'em, Kerr lost the business, we got it. [laughs]

Christie: Alright. That's great. They made, Owens made all kinds of interesting bottles, didn't they?

Bill: We made...when we went, when I went there, we made Avon, and it was a big business. We made Heinz (you made fancy bottles, right?) oh, yeah. Well, I've got some, I've got several of them here at the house, but I don't have them here right now. I got them outside. I've got one flint pistol, flint lock pistol. You know what flint glass is? (unh-huh, the clear one) It's a flint like
and it's as pretty as it can be. But anyway, we made Avon, we made Heinz catsup bottles, you remember the 57 Heinz catsup bottles (mmm-hmm) we lost that order, because they said we didn't get the 57 straight on the bottles (oh, you're kidding?) un-huh. They had, it wasn't really, well, that was the excuse, they had somebody that had bid on it under our price. We made Beechnut baby food, we made Gerber baby food bottles. We made all kinds of whiskey and beer and wine. We made all kind of pharmaceutical bottles. We made bottles to put all kind of chemicals in. So we made a variety of bottles over the years. And we were the factory that uh, if they couldn't make the bottles, some other factory, they always sent it to Huntington, because we had people that could make a bottle. And they were good. (the whole plant had a great reputation) Oh, they had one of the best.

When I first went there I think there was around 2800 people employed at Owens; 32 machines. And when I left there, there was around 800 people with 9 machines, and the 9 machines were producing as much tonnage as 32 and making more bottles. Because

it went to uh, automation. Electronics...and that uh, done away with it.

Christie: Automation also took many jobs.

Bill: Right. Well, 2800 to 800. So uh, over the years....

Christie: They have big layouts or....

Bill: No, what they would do they would lay maybe they'd shut a machine down, there was like 78 people for one machine. Now, that's [inaudible]...batch and furnace [inaudible] or the mixing, to make the glass, then the hot end. And then the uh, machine repair people that worked on machine parts. And then the mold makers. We hardly ever got anybody laid off. We just couldn't afford to let none of our people go. We didn't, couldn't get the work out. But then maintenance and the uh, packing floor, where the women packed the bottles, and shipping. Through that process there was about 78 people per lay. And so uh, like if a machine went down, they'd maybe lay 78 people off. Maybe they laid 50 off. Just depending on the situation.

Christie: So it happened in groups?

Bill: Casual. As they begin to shut machines down and furnaces, they begin to lay people off.

Christie: Was there any time when there was a big lay off or not?

Bill: Not uh, oh, they might be 100 or 125 people, something like that. But I, I really can't remember. 3 or 400 at a time

Christie: But never any in your department?

Bill: Well, all the years I've worked there we had one mold maker fired. We had uh, we never had anyone laid off because usually they would retire and they wouldn't replace 'em. (right) And that's the way a lot of it worked throughout the factory. (oh) People'd retire and they didn't bring nobody back to replace 'em. You picked up their job and yours, too.

Christie: So your job got to be more and more a heavier load.

Bill: But the job that I had, they couldn't put no more on me, because what I did, there was so many pieces to what I had to make, that they just couldn't add hardly anything on me. And they didn't bother me. They just let me take care of the finishing, and that was it. When they had a man that would take care of stuff like that, and take care of the schedule part of it, and repair it, and anything broke down I'd get it and fix it. They didn't have to come to me and tell me to do this or do that, because I'd just automatically do it. It was my job.

Christie: Right, right. So, your whole department was also all men, is that right? Were there any women...?

Bill: Well...we had all men, because things that we had to lift was too heavy for women. You wouldn't want, you wouldn't want to lift...some of the molds weighed 80 or 90 pounds for a half and you wouldn't want to lift that. It's too hard on you. But we did have women. We had one woman driving a truck, and the work was just too heavy for her. She did it awhile. (in trucking?) Unh-huh. Why I'm talking about trucking is they had an electric lift truck, and they had, they had the truck beds that they stacked the mold equipment on. But see, what they had to do, they had to take it back to the sandblaster, take it off the truck beds, put it on the belt, sandblast it, put it back on the load, but, see, it was so heavy they couldn't hardly lift it off the truck onto the belt. And the men had to do it, and if the women wanted the job, they had to do it, too. (right) And a lot of it was hot. And it was always dirty. The molds when they come off the machine lines were terribly, terribly dirty. And uh, then we had one, two women worked in shipping. I mean, in mold storage for awhile. Where they put the molds up and you got 'em out of the bins and bring 'em back upstairs. Then they packed jobs up and ship 'em out to different factories. And then we had uh, another one worked up in the shop, trucking. But one of the men helped her a lot. And finally, it just got too tough for her. But really, really and truly, no discrimination against ladies, but it was just too heavy a work for women to do. Now, we do have in the American Plant Glass Workers Union, we do have women mold makers now. In the mold shops. And they repair mold equipment. I don't know how many there is, but I do know there is some here.

Christie: Unh. So in the plant overall, men and women generally had different jobs? (right) Where were the women?

Bill: The women mostly was on packing, where they put the bottles in the boxes. It wasn't a heavy job like lifting mold equipment or machine parts. If you sent a woman out on a machine line, it's hot, and she'd have to climb up on a machine to put a piece of equipment on a machine, she couldn't hardly lift it. A set of or a set of molds might weigh 125 pounds, and there was no way she could climb up on the machines stand over here and over here, then put it down on a bracket to hold it. It's too heavy. (yeah) So the electric shop and maintenance and machine repair and mold shop, places like that, and the hot end, really wasn't the place for a woman. They would, jobs would come open, they would bid on it and try it, but it's too hard.

Christie: Now, when you first started though, in '56, all the women, they weren't, the women weren't even in any of those jobs. (no) Right? (no) When did they start allowing women to at least try...?

Bill: When this women's lib thing began to get strong and come out, women then began to want to do the men's job, and they had the right to bid on it. So, you couldn't keep them from bidding on a job. If they had the plant seniority, the job came open, if they wanted to bid on it, their right was to bid on it.

Christie: Is that something the union did for women?

Bill: No, no, it's just, not really. Uh...we didn't interfere with them in any way. And we were good to 'em and helped them as much as we could, and stuff like that. But you know, you can't do but just so much for them, and that's it.

Christie: Well, at least, you know, they were given the opportunity to bid, which is what they wanted (right)

Bill: Then they'd go back to their old job. We didn't fight 'em. We didn't harass 'em or anything like that. We were nice to them. And uh, they would try out and if they couldn't do it, why, they had so many days to go back to the job they was on.

Christie: Were there any women that were exceptional that you knew about, that were successful in a job that wasn't traditionally for women?

Bill: Well, they would work on it for awhile and then uh, what would usually happen was the job would come open, another job and somebody with more seniority would bump 'em off of it. (oh) See, what happens in a factory...you go by seniority. I mean, your department. As soon as a job opening comes open, and if you're younger than I am, and you want it, you can't have it; I get it. 'Cause seniority has the rights. But uh, like uh, in the Glass Bottle Blowers Association, GBBA, that's what it was called then, there was so many varieties of jobs and all of the shop, all of the factory except the mold shop and the hot end, was under that union. There was three unions in the factory. Mold Makers, GB's and then the hot end with the GB's but they were a different local from the others. So in all those varieties of jobs, in maintenance, machine repair, mold shop, electric shop, gauge shop, and the shipping and packing floor, there was a variety of jobs that women could bid on. (right) And the older women would bid and they, it would be too hard for them or something, and they'd bump back on their jobs. But we did have a lot of women working mens jobs in later years.

Christie: What kind of jobs?

Bill: Well, like in the gauge shop or up in Q & S.

Christie: What does that stand for?

Bill: Quality and Service. (oh, okay) Where they inspected the quality of the bottles (okay).

Christie: Now, what about when you started in 1956, were there black workers there then? (no) No. When can you remember the Owens plant first starting to hire blacks?

Bill: The year ...probably in the '70's. I would say. And see, we hired a bunch of people I think it was in the late '70's, and we got a bunch of bad people, smoking pot and doing drugs and a whole bunch of stuff. So they had to get rid of 'em. (this was strictly black people?) No (or just) a variety people. (the whole group) Variety. And uh, so uh, what they did to get rid of 'em, they couldn't fire 'em and everything, but they eliminate their

jobs. And they had five years recall rights. So they wouldn't hold off for five years, and then they would have to call 'em back.

Christie: So they had a big layoff and then they waited five years?

Bill: Right, right. They had to do it. 'Cause people would go in a men's locker room and stand in there and smoke pot. You can't have that. And job safety. And you can't do that. And what...they caught one guy sitting out on a railroad track where they brought sand in under a railroad car smoking pot. You can't do that. And different things like that. And uh, they just got a bunch of bad people and they had to get rid of 'em. Because of safety. You can't have somebody in there on drugs and pot and stuff working, because hey, you're jeopardizing too many other people's lives. (right) You don't do that. We had, we had...there was always people...in factories that's alcoholics, you know that. And there's always people that take drugs, smoked pot. But then they got to the point where that they were gonna check people for drugs and things. You know, they do that now. (right) But uh, I don't know whether they ever had a drug check over at Owens or not. (mmmh) I don't remember anybody having any.

Christie: So they started hiring blacks probably in the '70's. Were there any in the mold making? (no, there was none in our shop) Was there ever any? (not in our shop) No.

Bill: Not while I was there. The reason for it was, when you, when you went to be a mold maker, you had to be under 26 years old, to get on apprentice. So the last I'd say 15 years they called 'em cutbacks, we didn't hire nobody. We didn't need anybody. So, there was no room for any more.

Christie: No chance for anyone.

Bill: No chance for anyone. Nobody got in. See, in the last I'd say 15 years, we didn't even have a apprentice boy. Our last of apprentice boys I think they had about 15 years seniority in when the factory shut down, so, we didn't put nobody on. So, there was no chance. If, if a boy would have come up and passed the test and been eligible, we don't care what color his skin is, we'd put him to work. (right) But uh, we just didn't hire anybody.

Christie: Well, in the plant overall, about how many blacks did you think were there? Were there a lot of blacks that worked there?

Bill: I'd say we had one in the automotive shop, and we had about probably 4 or 5 in selecting, there might have been half a dozen or more. (did you know any of these people?) Not personally.

Christie: Of course, you didn't work with them.

Bill: Well, I knew the guy in the uh, automotive shop enough to talk to him. But personally, no. They were nice people. They worked. They...they did their thing.

Christie: Were there black women then, too? (yeah) Where were they?

Bill: They were on the selecting floor.

Christie: They were all in selecting.

Bill: See, when you hire in, you go to selecting. Then you transfer out of selecting. You either go to selecting or you're in shipping or machine line. (when you first start) When you first start. See, I started in shipping department. You don't just get hired in off the street and go into an apprenticeship program or machine repair (right), because the reason for it is, those are highly skilled jobs. They're the top paying jobs in the factory. And the people that's already in the factory when those kind of jobs come open, they bid on those jobs and they get 'em, because of their seniority, which is only fair. So that's why you don't hire off the street and come in and jump into a highly skilled job; it isn't fair.

Christie: Right. Now, the women uh, I was just wondering if they had been in selecting for a long time, they would have a lot of seniority, (right), so do the have chances to bid?

Bill: Well, the biggest part of the women was, right, they could bid on anything they wanted to.

Christie: They would have a lot more seniority than a lot of other...

Bill: Right. But they wouldn't bid on those jobs because they knew they couldn't do the job; it was too hard for them. What they did when a job opening come in, a job bid, they'd take the job bid and they'd post it on the bulletin board for so many days with a sheet of paper....

END OF SIDE 1

Bill: ...what happened whenever they put the job bids up, if you wanted to bid on a job, you'd go read the job description, what the job consisted of. If you wanted it, and you had the seniority, you sign up for it. Even if you didn't have the seniority, you might find some people with more seniority that might not, the job might not even appeal to them, they wouldn't want it, because of the type of job it was. (right) So everybody had a chance to bid on whatever job come open. In any department. So they didn't discriminate against the women there.

Christie: I was just wondering how that works since if they had more seniority, uh, but they didn't end up in a lot of the ...even like the supervisors positions?

Bill: Well, now, see (how does that work?) on the supervisors positions, the women on the packing floor, the biggest part of them

were in the supervising capacity. Selecting...because women did the selecting and mostly there were women bosses. But generally, there was a man who was over the whole shift, but women works under his. But then, they got to the point where women got to be shift foremans. (I see) They were in charge of a whole shift. Like A shift, B shift, C or D; there was four shifts. But uh, there was a lot of women supervisors.

Christie: Yeah. When you left?

Bill: In selecting. Oh, yeah. Even when I went there. (oh, really?) Oh, yeah. Back in those days they still got to be bosses. (in the selecting department). Yeah, they'd be over so many lahrs. Like, see, maybe they'd have like three lahrs, they were responsible for, and they might have, they could have anywhere from four to six women on a lahr. And they were responsible for those three lahrs. And the quality of ware those were putting down, and any defects in the bottles the women didn't pick out or anything, these women were responsible for them, and they had to make sure they got 'em out. Because now, they got in the boxes, and went to the customers, the customer'd ship 'em back. We had to pay the freight coming back. And we'd have to bring 'em back and dump 'em [inaudible] See, that cost a lot of money. They didn't want to do that.

Christie: What about pay? Did everyone get the same pay?

Bill: No, no, no. Our pay scale was different because of the negotiation of the union. Our wages was the highest wages paid in the factory for years. Yeah. We made more on the hour than anybody. And uh, but the thing of it was, machine, the people on the machine line that the bottles? They got a bonus. And I know my brother, he'd get, some weeks he'd get $80 or $100 bonus. (production?) Yeah. So uh, they made, those guys over there, they'd average if they worked all the time, and didn't lay off, they'd make 44, 45, $50,000 a year. (wow, that's good) It is. Hey, they made big money now. (yeah) It wasn't nothing to work overtime and bring home $1200 a week. If you work.

Christie: You said you were pretty friendly with the rest of the people that you worked with. Did you see them outside of the plant?

Bill: No, we didn't socialize outside of the factory. We were friends in the factory, we helped each other, we, if one guy needed something, all of us would pitch in and help him, or whatever, we helped each other. We worked together, we was good to each other. And but, as far as me socializing with 'em, I never socialized.

Christie: What about uh, company sponsored activities?

Bill: They used to have real company-sponsored activities years ago, before money got tight. Every Christmas they'd have candy for your kids, they'd go to Camden Park a day, and a lot of stuff.

They sponsored their own softball teams and everything. And we had a good thing like that. Then money got tight and they quit all that. (when was that? When did they change that?

Bill: When the money started gettin' tight? Ten years ago? I don't remember just exactly. But I know when my kids was little, I'd take them to Owens and they'd get their Christmas candy, and they'd give 'em a little stuffed animal or something like that. And it was good. And they had, they had a uh, out at East Lynn, they had a camp out there where they, where people went out there and partied and stuff like that, and the company sponsored. But then the last three or four years, they built a place down there behind the factory and they'd have cookouts and hot dogs and stuff like that. But years ago whenever a man retired, they'd put on a big retirement party for him. And his whole department would come. And they'd have the finest New York cut steaks and things you'd ever want to eat (wow). And, but then they got to the point, if you retired, they'd get some cold cuts and bring 'em up in the shop, and a little bit of cake and ice cream, and you was lucky to get that. And a lot of times the union bought the cake and the ice cream.

Christie: Mmmh. Now was that because, I know you said money was tight but wasn't there, 10 or 15 years ago, wasn't there a lot of mergers going on, and management changes?

Bill: Well, what happened, before KKR bought Owens out, and uh, then after they bought Owens out, Owens bought Brockway, Brockway Glass. (right) And we uh, we got in debt so bad they about lost the whole thing. The KKR see, when it bought all the stock up, they had a buy out; it really hurt the factory.

Christie: Those both happened back in the '80's? (yeah) So that's when a lot of things started getting tight?

Bill: Oh, yeah. And see, then, when they, when they uh, when they bought Brockway Glass out, they might have made a deal with Brockway to keep their supervisors, because they brought a lot of Brockway supervisors to Huntington, and Brockway Glass was 20 years behind Owens in technology. And the supervisors they brought in, they were not up on Owens equipment and technology and it really hurt us. (did they take the existing supervisors jobs?) Well, what they'd do, they'd transfer our existing supervisor, they'd buy 'em out. See, they bought a bunch of people out...they bought about 10,000 people out in Toledo at one time. When they had a buy out. And they'd buy a lot of the supervisors out, and retire 'em when they got 58 years old. They wanted younger men. And they brought these younger men in.

Christie: How did that cause the relationships to change?

Bill: It was bad.

Christie: Bringin outsiders in?

Bill: It was...see, because always before, just like the job that

I did as a working foreman, they should have give me the supervisors job. So I was qualified and, all the years experience and everything to do it. And what did they do? They went to Indiana, brought a guy in from Brockway Glass, and they asked me to train him. Because he had no experience?

Christie: You're kidding? (no) You trained him for a job you should have had?

Bill: I did not train him. (oh, you didn't?) I did not train him. (Good for you) [laughing] I would not train him.

Christie: And then he took the job that you would have had.

Bill: He took the job, the supervisors job. And he uh, he didn't know anything and the only thing he did when he came in there, he had one thing in mind. He wanted to fire 2 or 3 men. (that must have caused a lot of hard feelings.

Bill: It did. Oh, we had turmoil over it. Grievances filed on everything. But we just...had to put up with it. It's all you could do.

Christie: Was there nothing in your union or contract that would keep them from bringing outside people in?

Bill: No, not salary. We had nothing to do with salary. Whatever they did with salary was, that's the company. Whatever they did in the union, that was our business. (right) But salary's...

Christie: But you were next in line for that position. (right) But since it was salary, they can bring...

Bill: They can bring anybody they want to. When they brought the Brockway people in, we really had a lot of trouble. That was the biggest part of our downfall. And toward the last in production....it was just bad.

Christie: Was that true in all the departments?

Bill: Yeah.

Christie: It was kind of a general feeing?

Bill: It was a general, overall.... Especially, it was real bad on the selecting floor where they packed all the bottles. (oh, it was?) Real bad. (why was it worse there than ...?) Well, it was just the type of supervisor they brought in.

Christie: The individual people...(yeah)...make it rough on workers?

Bill: See, what they used to do...everybody in the factory was like family; we were like a big family. We were all local people. And we all worked together. And everybody helped everybody and all the supervisors and salary people were just local people like

myself. And you knew each other, and you worked together. But then when they started bringing all these strange people in, they didn't care nothing about the people. They were just indifferent to people like I am. And when they started bringing them in, they just, things just kind of fell apart.

Christie: And they start making all the cutbacks, all the social activities.

Bill: Yeah, all that was gone. And everything went down the drain.

Christie: What other kinds of changes? On the jobs did they make different changes?

Bill: No, they didn't make changes...well, they tried to. We had I know in some of the unions they had, we had one personnel director come in there, and the first week or two I believe he was in there, the president of the other union told me that he fired 84 people. But, he got 'em like the president went to him and how he kept the peoples' job was like putting them on probation, but that's not what they called it. And uh, they reviewed the cases, and the people didn't get fired. (oh, they didn't?) But that's the kind of people they brought in. So, it's hard to work for people like that. It really is.

Christie: Mmmh. Yeah, it sounds like the atmosphere really changed dramatically (oh, it did), from the time you starged until the time you left.

Bill: From the time I started Owens, 'til the time I left, the last 10 years was bad years. The first years were good years. But because of the personnel changes, it made it difficult. But of course, people like myself, it didn't bother me because...(people like who?)...myself. (oh) It didn't bother me like it did other people. Because I was...I was in the type of job that they had to keep me in, depend upon me to take care of what I did, because they didn't know anything about what I did.

Christie: You probably felt like you had more job security, than a lot of other people?

Bill: I did. Because they had to come to me and ask me. (right) See, they didn't know. They'd come and say, "Bill, what can we do to get the slug out of the bottle neck? What are we gonna do to the plunger? Are you gonna shorten, are we gonna change the taper, are we gonna change the radius on the end of them? What are we gonna do?" See, they didn't know. And uh, so they had to depend upon a person like myself. Not that I'm, I'm not blowing my whistle, don't misunderstand me.

Christie: But that's very important to have job security.

Bill: But that's the truth. That's just, that's just a fact.

Christie: Especially with the new personnel that came in.

Bill: Right. It was. That's just the way it was. And uh, when they needed something fixed like that, they just come to me and say, "Here's the problem. Can you fix it?" And they'd just take off. They would depend upon me to figure out what was wrong and fix it, because they didn't know. But, still yet, when you finish the job, [inaudible].... But they had nothing to do with it.

[laughter]

Bill: But that was all right. We still had a good job, and we was making good money, and it didn't make any difference. Well, I could care less. (yeah)

Christie: So, maybe a little bit more about your home life. You had seven children here and your wife's. (well, we didn't have...some of them was already grown) Oh, they were?

Bill: We had uh, we had five at home at one time.

Mary: Did you wife work?

Bill: She drove a school bus for nine years.

Mary: Wasn't it difficult or I should say it was difficult trying to ...both of you work, and having children running around....

Bill: We both worked together and helped each other. (and the older children I guess, helped out) Well, yeah, they helped out, and Mike, he went to college, and then they began to leave home. Two of the kids, before we got married, two of her kids were already out on their own. (oh,they were?) Yeah, so. We didn't have much....

Christie: [inaudible]

Bill: Well, now, she was home, she just drove the bus in the mornings, she was out about an hour and a half and she was back home. And then about an hour and a half she was gone that evening and right back. She wasn't like...she was home all day. (okay)

Christie: Well, uh, you said you worked, you retired in 1982, after 35 and a half years?

Bill: Thirty-five years and ten months.

Christie: What made you decide to retire?

Bill: Well, I was past 62.

Christie: You decided to retire at 62?

Bill: Well, my birthday was in February and I retired the first of July.

Christie: And what kind of benefits are you getting?

Bill: Very poor benefits. (very poor benefits) Owens-Illinois, when a man retired, they really hurt us on insurance. Now, my insurance is like uh, for me and my wife, it's like $2500 a piece deductible a year. What they do, they take and multiply 60 times medicare deductible and that's what our deductible is. So, medicare deductible raises every year and ours will raise again. But uh, we got company pension and we've got social security.

Christie: Pension is according to how many years you worked there, or your salary or what?

Bill: No, what it is...you get like, if you get, like $20 for each year you was there, or you get $22 for each year you was there, that's how they figure that.

Christie: Okay. So the pension was good, but the medical benefits were terrible.

Bill: The medical benefits stinks. I mean, they're lousy. (yeah) It's not right. See, see, this is what's wrong with our country about insurance today. Now, that company could have let us went ahead and stayed in the group insurance after we retired, went ahead and paid our premium like we was, and it wouldn't have hurt a thing. But they don't want to do that. And see, they got so much money in the retirement fund, they don't know what to do with it. And they can't spend it. They could give their people more, if they would.

Christie: Now, salary workers ...

Bill: Salary workers got a super insurance, they got a super retirement. They took extra good care of their supervisors.

Christie: Sounds like that was a very big part of the benefit of being a supervisor. (right, that's right)

Bill: If you was supervisor, you got good insurance and you got a good retirement. See, this is kind of discrimination against the people...in my book. 'Cause we worked just as hard as they did to make Owens what Owens was. Without us, they wouldn't have had anything.

Christie: Now, how did they decide, I know in later years you said [inaudible]...Brockway, but in earlier years, not, not necessarily you personally, how did they decide who move up from workers to salary?

Bill: Well, the way they do it, it's almost like politics. It's uh, supervisors got pets, just like anybody else. And who they liked and who was their pet, they plugged for 'em. Regardless of what abilities they had, or what skill they had, it didn't make any difference. They'd take 'em and train 'em. Okay.

Christie: You didn't need seniority for that, though.

Bill: No.

Christie: So who ever they wanted to train.

Bill: Whoever they wanted to train.

Christie: Uh...I forgot to ask you when we were talking about the unions, how the, all the unions, I guess there was a merger where there was only like two different unions, instead of four, or....

Bill: Tdhere was three. They never did merge.

Christie: Oh, they didn't? 'Cause I thought the women used to be separate, and then somehow they merged.

Bill: See, there was a, the uh, the selecting people, the out front people we call 'em, and then the machine line, where they made the bottle, and then us. So, here's the way it was. Selecting, maintenance, uh, machine repair, gauge shop, and those people and shipping, belong to one union. (okay) And then all the operators, they operated the machines, they belong to a different local. But it's still under the same heading. But then we belong to American Flint Glass Workers Union (okay).

Christie: Well, how did, what I was wondering is how the different unions, particularly the leaders of the union, get along with the company?

Bill: They got along good. (did that work out? the friendly relationship?) Yeah, we didn't have no trouble.

Christie: Is that true in the end, after the new ownership came in?

Bill: Well, not really, it really wasn't a new ownership, it was just new people coming in. (new managers) New managers.

Christie: That didn't, that didn't change the relationships? (No)

Bill: See, the company and the union has to work together (right) in order to maintain a factory. So we, we were all, we all tried to get along with each other the best we could, in order to have a good working relationship. If you don't have a good working relationship, you're not gonna have good production or anything else.

Christie: Yeah. It sounds like the workers, the people that you worked with day in and day out, did work very well together (oh, we did), got along well together.

Bill: Now there was, there was times people would get in a little spat with each other, that's human nature. But it didn't amount to anything.

Christie: Did the men and women also get along? (yeah) There

wasn't ....

Bill: There wasn't any problems. Thing of it is, there's been two or three guys, three or four guys had a fight down there, but the factory didn't get in to it and fight. But...if you got into a fight, they would fire you. And...see, if you started something, and it was your fault and you jumped on another person, if he was defending himself, they'd fire you. But there was several of those skirmishes like that over the years. That's gonna happen among people. (yeah) But uh, they might only have fired 2 or 3 out of the whole thing that ever happened.

Christie: Why would they be fighting?

Bill: Just get into an argument about something and get into it, disagreement and...(nothing to do with work?)...no, maybe it was something, maybe they went to drink in a bar sometime and something...maybe they was fightin' over a woman. [laughs]

Christie: Did you ever have any conflicts?

Bill: I got along pretty good. Oh, I've had people get upset and wouldn't speak to me for a day or two but..few days, but it didn't amount to anything. I never had no...nothing like that.

Christie: I think I've asked you everything that I wanted to talk about. It seems like the union was a benefit to you, as far as pay and (oh, yeah)....

Bill: See, the thing of it...let me explain a little bit about the union. If management could, they'd pay you minimum wage, with no insurance, no retirement benefits, or anything, any benefits. Now, this is business. (right) It's business. But...when you've got a union, you've got a bargaining power. You can bargain with the company for insurance, retirement benefits, and things of this nature, insurance. And that's what the union's all about. And better working conditions. So uh, you know, back in the early years people would come in there and that's before they had unions, and if somebody didn't like you, they'd fire you and there'd be somebody standing out there to take your job for 50 cents an hour. So, you can't...if we hadn't had a union, then we wouldn't have retirement, we wouldn't have insurance, we wouldn't have got paid holidays, we wouldn't have got vacation or anything of that nature. But since we had a union, we got vacations, we got insurance, we got retirement, and we had a good work relationship. We had a good, safe shop to work in. And you didn't have somebody that was, come in there and say, "Well, I don't like your looks. You're fired. Get out". (right) See, that's the way they would do. And uh, but uh, unions are good, and unions are bad. But I've been in the union all my life that I've ever worked. And I'm glad I was. (yeah) Because I've got good benefits.

Christie: There's one specific question that I don't know if you've heard of. But I was wondering if you knew anything about this Opal Mann lawsuit? Against the plant. Apparently there was a lawsuit, and it

lawsuit against the plant. But I was just wondering if you knew anything about it? (what kind of lawsuit?) Uh...it was a woman who worked in selecting and it has to do with uh, like in, uh, promotion based on seniority, but I don't really know very much about it.

Bill: Well, that could happen. It could happen. If they went around somebody and uh, they had the seniority and right qualifications, and they didn't promote them, then they could sue 'em.

Christie: It was just something that had came up in a different interview, and like, I was wondering if it was something the whole plant knew about. Or....

Bill: Well, if anything went on in the plant, everybody knew it. If you done one thing, then everybody knew it. If you had your car worked on, they'd have your bill on the bulletin board tomorrow. They, you couldn't hide nothing from 'em. [laughter] I don't care what you'd done, they'd find it out. It was funny (yeah), but a lot of people would come in there and tell stuff on themselves, then when they'd tell on themself, it just spread like wildfire. It would be funny, too. But nothing went on over there that everybody didn't know it. People got out of line, courting and stuff like that, everybody knew it. (oh, really?) [laughter] (you couldn't keep anything secret, unh?) Yeah, you didn't keep no secrets.

Christie: Well, that's really all I have to ask. Was there anything you wanted, any other comments or stories you wanted to talk about that are important to you that I didn't ask?

Bill: Not really. I want to say this. I made a good living for my family, and I'm thankful that I had a good job. And they were good to me. And I appreciate it. And one little funny story, I will tell you. We had an old man when the factory moved from Cincinnati down here, and his name was Jimmy Yegerson (Yegerson) unh-huh, and he was all the time telling funny stories. And he never did tell nothing dirty. They was just little funny things. He said one time that they was out at Cincinnati, and they were asking him and his cousin and said that uh, you know these ice holes, air bubbles in the ice, you've seen 'em, said we was skating along, and said my cousin fell down through one of them, and said he cut his head off right there. And said his head and body met at the next hole. And said he froze back on. (oh) And he said, you know, we went home and we was standing around a big old stove, gettin' warm, said his head fell off and rolled clear across the floor. [laughter] Now, he told tales like that. Then he said one time, he said, standing there in Cincinnati, said my uncle had a big number three washtub sittin' out on the sidewalk. And said he reached down to pick that up and he said, you know he was [inaudible]...he went into the sidewalk, clear up to his knees. [laughs] (he sounds like a real character) Little things like that.

Christie: Now, who was this guy again?

Bill: Jimmy Yegerson. (he came back, he came down from Cincinnati?) See, the factory, when they bought the factory from Bowingsit was up there, they came down here. (oh, okay) And he was one of the old men that came here. But one time we had five furnaces, 32 machines, approximately 2800 people. When I left in '92, we had 3 furnaces, 9 machines, 800 people, putting out full production, and tonnage of glass than we did with 2800 and 32 machines. And better quality ware.

Christie: Well, thank you very much.

Bill: Why, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW